

**Your  
Seattle  
Parks and Recreation**

**Memorandum**



Date: February 27, 1987  
To: Pat Elder  
From: Sapphire Blue *SB*  
Subject: Volunteer Park Shrub Beds

It has become increasingly apparent that many of the shrub beds in Volunteer Park are in need of renovation. Without altering the horticultural integrity of the park, it is possible to make changes that would address issues of maintenance, safety, health and aesthetics.

At present, many of the shrub beds form a circular pattern with a diameter of upwards to 100'. The center of these shrub beds has been used for sexual activity, transient headquarters and drinking parties. Plant material is in poor condition or non-existent and the ground is continually littered with feces, condoms, bottles, cardboard, etc. Park Department employees are concerned for both their own health and the health of the public, especially children who play in the park.

Additionally, many people have reported being startled or frightened as a result of someone suddenly appearing from inside a shrub bed. In many cases, the shrubs are overgrown. When this situation exists in close proximity to a path, bench or play area, a person using or working in the park may be placed in a position of vulnerability.

From an aesthetic standpoint, many of the beds have been altered haphazardly over the years. Holly and other volunteer plants have been left to grow. Inappropriate additions such as English laurel have been made. High maintenance plants such as boxwood have been overplanted. In some beds the plant material is leggy, culturally suffering or near death.

The maintenance considerations are: The amount of time necessary to edge these large shrub beds, mow small grass strips, pick up enormous amounts of litter, prune high maintenance shrubs, rake out leaves, spread mulch, pull weeds and apply various chemicals such as pesticides and fertilizers.

It would seem appropriate to work from an agreed upon approach to shrub bed renovation that would address the above problems without destroying the essential character of the park. The Olmsted idea was the preservation of views and open space, broken by green islands. This design can be preserved while reducing maintenance time traps, by decreasing the width of some beds, slightly altering the shape, or removing or changing inappropriate plant material.

Taking one bed at a time, each island must be examined and reviewed. A decision can then be reached and implemented in an efficient and cohesive manner. Input from the design staff is appropriate in some cases. In many cases, only minimal changes are necessary, such as the removal of a section of boxwood or English

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laurel. These beds needing small changes would be a good starting point. By utilizing bed shapes that are long and narrow, L-shaped or crescent shaped, the same feeling of a large bed can be preserved, while allowing for less maintenance and increased safety. Plant choice should remain consistent with original design intent.

A suggested starting point would be the removal of a stand of English laurel inappropriately planted on the east side of the "Dahlia Bed". The plants are encroaching on a bench and cannot easily be maintained at an appropriate height. Their removal would allow a reduction of the overall width of that side, without destroying the character of the bed. Several rhododendrons would probably need replacement.

A larger project which encompasses all of the problems mentioned above, is the renovation of the rhododendron beds along the west side of the "Loop Road" just south of the tennis courts. The services of the design staff and landscape crew would be desirable in this case.

Another small project is the removal of a ring of boxwood around a tree adjacent to the path on the south side of the museum. The boxwood serves no apparent functional or aesthetic purpose and is problematic from a maintenance and safety standpoint.

The children's play area is another case of overgrown laurels and inappropriate plantings.

As mentioned, these issues can be addressed on a case-by-case basis as time and staff size allows. Byron has indicated he would provide assistance where feasible.

A meeting with you and a tour of the sites at this time would allow us to schedule the work before the summer.

SMB:pl

(Submitted with input from John Candy)

cc: Herman Lantz

Volunteer Park, Louisa Boren Viewpoint, GAR Cemetery  
1985 Report  
Sapphire Blue

The 1985 objectives for Volunteer Park, Louisa Boren Viewpoint and GAR cemetery have not been met. Equipment and staffing remains inadequate to accomplish the desired park restoration.

1985 ~~One improvement was accomplished in Volunteer Park. The Seattle Art Museum driveway was widened to accommodate large delivery trucks.~~

Vandalism continues to be a problem and heavy use, including many scheduled events, adds stress to the physical environment. Volunteer Park continues to require repair, due to drain lines that were cut and filled at the time the automatic irrigation system was installed. Turf areas and shrub beds are in need of renovation and a regular maintenance schedule. Major work at the Volunteer Park water tower and reservoir is still needed. Many trees are in a state of decline and are in need of pruning, and/or replacement.

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With no budget or personnel increases for 1986, no improvements are anticipated. Several areas of Volunteer park will need to be minimally maintained. Louisa Boren Viewpoint and GAR Cemetery will continue at the present sub-standard maintenance level.

1987 will hopefully see the application of the 1-2-3 bond money. Improvements to roadways, walks and drains are scheduled.